

29 Musō Soseki: *Dialogues in a Dream* (1344)

Introduced by Christoph Kleine

Introduction

The passages below are taken from a collection of questions and answers written in common and simple Japanese by Musō Soseki 夢窓疎石 (1275–1351). Soseki was the most prominent and influential figure of the state-sponsored Gozan (Five Temples) system of Zen monasteries of the Rinzaï school. He acted as the spiritual mentor to emperors and military rulers of the Muromachi period (1333–1568), including Ashikaga Tadayoshi 足利直義 (1306–1352), who, together with his elder brother Takauji 足利尊氏 (1305–1358), had founded the Muromachi shogunate in 1338. Takauji took charge of military affairs, and Tadayoshi of judicial and administrative matters.

The *Dialogues in a Dream* constitute Soseki's answers to Tadayoshi's questions on Buddhism, Zen, asceticism, and related issues. Written in the same year as Zonkaku's *Haja kenshō shō*, the text provides the most detailed and elaborate treatment of the relationship between 'religion' and 'politics' up to that point.

In contrast to Zonkaku, who wrote his text for followers of his community, Soseki addressed a prominent representative of the ruling elite – and thus of the ruler's law. He therefore faced a fundamentally different problem: the question here was how a ruler could reconcile the two nomospheres. Obviously, the two nomospheres are based on quite different ethical principles. The Buddha Dharma, for example, forbids the killing of people, while the use of violence and the imposition of the death penalty form some of the ruler's central tasks. The ruler's law is supposed to pacify the world with violence and military means (*bu* 武), the Buddha Dharma with moral instruction and spiritual cultivation (*bun* 文). How can a leading representative of state power fulfil his duties if he is a devout Buddhist? This question looms large in the passages printed here.

Another interesting feature of the text is that Soseki frequently uses the term "mundane law" (*sehō* 世法) instead of "ruler's law" (*ōbō*), although it seems obvious that both terms refer to the same concept.

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Bibliographical Information

Musō Soseki 夢窓疎石. *Muchū mondō* 夢中間答 [Dialogues in a Dream]. Vol 1. 3 vols. 1400. <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/2543492>; 4–6, 54–60.

Page numbers given in square brackets refer to this edition.

The translation adopted here can be found in:

Musō Soseki 夢窓疎石. *Dialogues in A Dream*. Translated by Thomas Yūhō Kirchner. Kyoto: Tenryū-ji Institute for Philosophy and Religion, 2010; 69–70; 127–32.

The headers are given by Kirchner. There are none in the original text.

Further consulted Edition:

Satō Taishun 佐藤泰舜. *Muchū mondō* 夢中間答, 21st ed. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1991; 18–19; 60–65.

Translation Adopted from Thomas Yūhō Kirchner

2. The Way of the Buddha, the Way of the World

Question [by Ashikaga Tadayoshi]: Since the pursuit of happiness [*fuku* 福] through worldly activities [*seken no waza* 世間ノワザ] results in sinful karma [*zaigō* 罪業], it is only natural that it should be prohibited. However, by praying for happiness we reverently turn to the buddhas and the gods [*busshin* 佛神], and by reciting the sutras and dhāraṇīs we deepen our karmic connections [*kechi'en* 結縁] with them. Therefore, shouldn't these activities be permitted?

Answer [by Musō Soseki]: Considering the part of establishing a karmic connection [with the Buddhas], it must be said that this is indeed superior to seeking happiness through secular activities [p. 4/5]. But then, those so foolish as to focus solely on worldly happiness [*sefuku* 世福] are hardly worthy of mention. How much more foolish are those who – having received a human body (so hard to obtain!) and encountered the Law of the Buddha [*buppō* 佛法] (so rarely encountered!) – spurn the Supreme Way in order to chant sutras and dhāraṇīs for the sake of worldly happiness. A man of old said, “To forget the passions while in the mundane nomosphere [*sehō* 世法] – this is the Law of the Buddha [*buppō* 佛法]. To arouse the passions while in the nomosphere of the Buddha [*buppō* 佛法] – this is the law of the world [*sehō* 世法].” Though one practices the Buddha's Law [*buppō* 佛法], attains awakening [*bodai* 菩提], and takes the great vow to liberate all sentient beings [*shujō* 衆生], should one then arouse feelings of attachment, one will benefit neither oneself nor others. How much less does this help to emancipate ourselves from our egos. And it does not benefit the sentient beings. How, then, could it possibly be in accord with the profound

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considerations [*myōryo* 冥慮] [of the Buddhas] to worship the buddhas and gods and recite the sutras and dhāraṇīs, merely to gain worldly fame and profit [*seken no meiri* 世間ノ名利]? Even worldly activities create good karmic roots if done in order to further the practice of the Buddha's Laws and guide other sentient beings. And if in performing these activities you come to awakening, then not only does your prior work in the world serve for the benefit of all beings and contribute to the practice of the Buddha's Laws, but it also becomes itself the mysterious functioning of ineffable liberation [*fushigi gedatsu* 不思議解脱]. This is what the *Lotus Sutra* means when it says that “earning a living and producing things never transgresses the True Law.”

[p. 6–54]

17. Buddhism and Government

Question: There have been leaders who became so involved in cultivating the roots of goodness [*zengon* 善根] that it hindered them in government [*seidō* 政道] and impeded their ability to rule the world [*se* 世]. Why was this?

Answer: In a sacred text¹ it is written, “Good fortune without wisdom [*chifuku* 癡福] is the enemy of three lifetimes.” Owing to good fortune, one ends up spending one's life performing only tainted good [*urō no zen* 有漏ノ善]^I and thus misses the opportunity to illuminate the mind-ground [*心地*].^{II} This is good fortune without wisdom as the enemy of a single lifetime. Because of the tainted good one has performed, one achieves a fortunate rebirth as a human or a god within the realm of desire [*yok-kai* 欲界].^{III} One's attachments to the world [*seken* 世間] thereby deepen and one's evil habits increase. Even if one avoids creating much evil karma, one's mind is distracted by political affairs [*seimu* 政務] and one's free time is occupied with entertainments, preventing practice of the true Dharma [*shōbō* 正法]. This is good fortune without wisdom as the enemy of two lifetimes. By the next rebirth the roots of one's tainted goodness, generated during one's earlier life, are exhausted, and there is an increase in

1 [editorial note 199 in the original] This quote is found in the *Recorded Sayings of Meditation Master Dahui Pujue* 大慧普覺禪師語錄 (T 47: 942a).

I CK: Literally “leaking good.” In Chinese Buddhism, the technical term “漏” is used to translate the Sanskrit terms “*sāsrava*” and “*āsrava*.” Whereas it literally means “to leak,” in Buddhism it denotes “being flawed,” “tainted,” or “contaminated.” Basically, this means that a person performs good, wholesome deeds, but that these are still tainted by their personal intentions, and by attitudes of like and dislike.

II CK: The true mind that all sentient beings are originally endowed with, and which is the locus of the production of the myriad phenomena.

III CK: The realm of desire (Skt. *kāma-dhātu*) is the lowest of the three realms of existence, the other two being the realm of form (*shiki kai* 色界; Skt. *rūpa-dhātu*), and the realm of formlessness (*mushiki kai* 無色界; Skt. *ārūpya-dhātu*). The realm of desire comprises the realms of hells, hungry spirits, animals, asuras, men, and the six heavens of desire. To be born as a human being or as a god within the realm of desire requires good karma.

the influence of the fundamental ignorance rooted in the beginningless past. As a result one falls into the evil realms [*akushu* 惡趣].^{IV} This is good fortune without wisdom as the enemy of three lifetimes. In texts like the *Sutra on Trapuśa and Bhallika*² the Buddha does indeed expound that one should practice tainted good such as the five precepts [*gokai* 五戒] and the ten good deeds [*jūzen* 十善]. This is known as the teachings for humans and gods. The Buddha, when guiding those whose poor karmic habits from previous lives make them unable to practice the true Dharma, would utilize their desire for rebirth in the human and celestial realms by advising them to practice the tainted good, and in this way would gradually lead them toward the true Dharma. Thus, in view of the fact that we live in the Latter Age of the Dharma [*matsudai* 末代], it is fine to practice tainted good in the belief that devotion in the present life will bring good fortune in the next [p. 54/55], and there is no need to discourage this. Nevertheless, it is the true intention of the Thus-Come-One^V [*nyorai no hon'i* 如來ノ本意] that such practice be done in such a way that it does not become “the enemy of three lifetimes.”

Whatever good acts one may do, if one has not yet awakened to the mind-ground, those acts never go beyond the level of tainted good. This is why the masters of the contemplative and doctrinal schools recommend that one first illuminate the mind-ground before engaging in good works. Tiantai Zhiyi,³ for example, in his system of six stages of practice⁴ that clarifies the process of awakening, forbids those at the second stage⁵ from preaching the Dharma for the benefit of others and from chanting sutras and dhāraṇīs for their own benefit, on the grounds that at this stage

2 [editorial note 200 in the original] The *Sutra on Trapuśa and Bhallika* 提謂波利經 is an apocryphal sutra centering on a narrative of the brothers Trapuśa and Bhallika, who became disciples of the Buddha soon after his enlightenment. The text is concerned with how sentient beings should be taught following the passing of the Buddha.

3 [editorial note 201 in the original] Tiantai Zhiyi 天台智顗 (J., Tendai Chigi; 538–597) was the third patriarch and de facto founder of the Chinese Tiantai school.

4 [editorial note 202 in the original] The six stages of practice 六即 are: (1) the stage at which one is a buddha in theory, though not yet aware of the Buddha-nature inherent within all beings (理即); (2) the stage at which one learns of this inherent Buddha-nature through hearing the name and words of the Dharma (名字即); (3) the stage at which one begins the practice of meditation (觀行即); (4) the stage at which the sense-roots are purified, illusion is to a certain extent transcended, and a semblance of the Buddha's enlightenment is attained (相意似即); (5) the stage of progressive awakening to true wisdom, in which one eliminates all illusion except fundamental ignorance and progressively advances toward full enlightenment (分眞即); and (6) the stage of full enlightenment, at which fundamental ignorance is eliminated and Buddha-nature is fully realized (究竟即).

5 [editorial note 203 in the original] The second of the six stages is regarded as the first stage of understanding, since it is at this stage that the awakening process begins (the first stage is the stage of the unawakened).

IV CK: That is, the lower spheres of birth within the realm of desire, namely the realms of hells, hungry spirits and animals.

V CK: Skt. *tathāgatā* a common epithet for a Buddha.

such activities constitute a hindrance to the Way. Only at the third stage of practice is sutra and dhāraṇī chanting permitted; at the fourth stage some preaching of the Dharma is allowed; at the fifth stage one practices the six pāramitās⁶ along with the Tendai meditations; and at the sixth stage one is able to correctly practice the six pāramitās and benefit others. In the *Essential Teachings of Meditation Master Foguo Yuanwu Zhenjue* [圓悟真覺; 1063–1135] there is an essay entitled “Awakening Nature and Encouraging Good,”⁷ in which it is stated that one should first awaken [*satorite* 悟りて] to one’s true nature [*shinjō* 眞性] and only after that cultivate the roots of goodness. Virtuous deeds performed by one who has not realized the mind-ground give rise only to tainted good and thus cannot lead to liberation [*shutsuri* 出離] from the evil paths [*akudō* 惡道]. One may preach the Dharma and guide people, but since this is only great compassion based on affection it is not truly transformative guidance [*kedō* 化導]. This is why tainted good roots [*urō no zengon* 有漏ノ善根] are discouraged and practice of the true Dharma encouraged. [p. 55/56]

If those who warn against overinvolvement in the cultivation of good roots are doing so for the sort of reasons mentioned above, then this is commendable advice. However, if their true purpose is only to stress worldly affairs [*sezoku* 世俗] and demean the Buddha’s Law [*buppō* 佛法], then their intention is demonic indeed. Those who receive birth in the human realm, whether their station in life is high or low, all do so because of their practice of the five precepts and the ten good actions in former lives. People of exceptional good fortune who show unusual vitality and strength of character are those who were especially dedicated to these practices, and who also performed numerous additional meritorious acts. The fact that you are respected throughout the land as a military leader is solely because of your stores of good karma from former lives.⁸ Nevertheless, there are in the world those who oppose you, and even among those who serve you as retainers there are few who are truly selfless in following your commands. In view of this, I would suggest that your performance of meritorious acts in your earlier lives might not have fully sufficed. Could you then be said in your present life to be excessive in your practice of the virtues? Comparing the amount of evil committed since the first year of the Genkō era⁹ with the amount of good that was done, which of the two is greater? During this period, how many

6 [editorial note 204 in the original] The six pāramitās are the “six perfections” by means of which one attains liberation from the world of birth-and-death. The six pāramitās are: (1) dāna (布施), charity or giving; (2) śīla (持戒), keeping the precepts, maintaining moral conduct; (3) kṣānti (忍辱), patience and forbearance; (4) vīrya (精進), zeal and devotion; (5) dhyāna (禪定), contemplation or meditation; (6) prajñā (智慧), transcendental wisdom.

7 [editorial note 205 in the original] The “Awakening Nature and Encouraging Good” 悟性勸善文 chapter of the *Essential Teachings of Meditation Master Foguo Yuanwu Zhenjue* 佛果圓悟真覺禪師心要 can be found at x 69: 474a–c. For Yuanwu Keqin, see note 26, p. 377.

8 [editorial note 206 in the original] This sentence refers to Ashikaga Tadayoshi.

9 [editorial note 207 in the original] See Introduction, pp. 30–31, and note 57, p. 380: The Genkō era lasted from 1331 to 1334].

men have been slaughtered as foes, leaving their wives, children, and other dependents to wander about with nowhere to go? The deaths of those who have fallen in battle, enemy and ally alike, all constitute sinful karma for you. Fathers have lost their sons, and sons have lost their fathers. The number of those who have suffered in this way is beyond all reckoning [p. 56/ 57]. If they could at least receive compensation for their loyalty they would have some consolation, but those who are not daimyos or who lack influential connections have no way of gaining your ear, and thus their appeals go unanswered. Their resentment will not soon disappear. Even now I hear talk of victories, but such victories are simply the slaying of more enemies and the amassing of more evil karma. How many shrines, temples, inns, and homes in the cities and countryside have been burnt or destroyed, how many properties have been confiscated to provide supplies for the military or rewards for loyal vassals? As a result of this, shrine rituals are seldom performed and temple services have been neglected. People who possess estates but are not themselves warriors can no longer control their lands. Lodgings have been requisitioned, leaving many people with no place to dwell. Good government is not being practiced, and the sorrow of people both highborn and lowborn grows ever deeper. It is entirely because of this that the land is not at peace. Why then are you so concerned about the overcultivation of virtue? If only everyone would devote themselves to the good works that you mention then this world would truly become a Pure Land [*jōdo* 淨土].^{VI} In what way could this hinder governance?

Since ancient times many kings and ministers both in other countries and in Japan have been devout believers in the Buddha's Law [*buppō* 佛法]. Among them have been some who espoused the Buddha's Law for the sake of secular law [*sehō* 世法], while others have taken the secular law in order to promote the Buddha's Law [p. 57/58]. Although leaders who put their trust in the Buddha's Law in order to improve the quality of secular law are superior to evil kings and ministers who lack all faith in the Buddha's Law, they only care for themselves and their splendor is [just an illusion like] in a dream. Although the populace is thereby spared for a time the suffering of hunger and cold, neither the highborn nor the lowborn are spared the suffering of birth and death [*rin'e* 輪廻]. In this sense even the rule of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors^{VII} is not truly worthy of praise, since the Buddha's Law was not yet known in their lands. In contrast, leaders who rule for the sake of the Buddha's Law are truly lay bodhisattvas,^{VIII}

VI CK: In Buddhism there are many "pure lands", ruled over by a Buddha, into which devout Buddhists wish to be born. In most cases, however, *jōdo* specifically refers to the "Land of Utmost Bliss" (*sukhāvati*) of the Buddha Amida (Skt. Amitābha or Amitāyus).

VII CK: *Sankō gotei* 三皇五帝. This refers to the idealised rulers of the mythical Chinese past. There are some variations when it comes to the identification of the names. A common list is: Three Sovereigns: 1. Fu Xi 伏羲, 2. Nüwa 女媧, 3. Shennong 神農; Five Emperors: 1. Huangdi 黃帝, 2. Zhuanxu 顓頊, 3. Ku 嚳, 4. Yao 堯, 5. Shun 舜.

VIII CK: *Zaike bosatsu* 在家菩薩, i.e. beings who whole-heartedly strive for full awakening and Buddhahood, and who have promised to save all sentient beings from the circle of life and death without, however, becoming monks or nuns.

skillful in guiding the populace to the Buddha's Law. In Japan, Prince Shōtoku constructed temples and pagodas, enshrined Buddhist images, lectured on the sutras and treatises, and commented on the holy texts, even as he handled all of the various affairs of state. This is meant by promoting secular law for the sake of the Buddha's Law. When, at the beginning of the Seventeen Article Constitution,¹⁰ Prince Shōtoku wrote that relations between the highborn and lowborn should be harmonious and amicable and that the Three Treasures should be revered, it was in order to emphasize that government [*seidō* 政道] should be conducted for the sake of the Buddha's Law. For this reason no one in the land opposed the prince's rule while he was alive, and in the seven centuries since his death all have honored his achievements. The only one to oppose him was Mononobe-no-Moriya,¹¹ who was in the end defeated by the prince. Moriya was an important minister in the government and was an outstanding figure in politics, yet he was severely punished because of his obstruction of the prince's virtuous works. [p. 58/59] This is all stated in the records preserved at Tennō-ji, written in the prince's own hand. Elsewhere, Emperor Wu¹² of the Liang dynasty is sometimes criticized for having lost his kingdom to the general Hou Jing¹³ because of his involvement in good works and his consequent neglect of his political duties. What, then, of the Tathāgata Śākyamuni, who [in an incarnation; CK] as crown prince under King Śuddhodana was expected to succeed to the throne, but who instead left the world and se-

10 [note 208 in the original] The Seventeen Article Constitution 十七条憲法, issued in 604 CE, is a code of moral precepts attributed to the imperial regent Prince Shōtoku. The code outlined the general ethical principles by which the government and its subjects were expected to live in order to achieve a peaceful and harmonious society. It was firmly based on Confucian principles, with considerable influence from the Buddhist teachings.

11 [note 209 in the original] See note 159, p. 390[: Prince Shōtoku 聖德太子 (574–622) was the second son of Emperor Yōmei 用明 (r. 585–587). When Empress Suiko 推古 (554–628) of the Soga family ascended the throne in 593, she appointed Shōtoku as her regent, making Shōtoku the de facto ruler of Japan. Shōtoku is historically important for his promotion of Buddhism and his initiation of many major governmental reforms. After the death of Emperor Yōmei a power struggle broke out between the Soga clan, led by Soga no Umako 蘇我馬子 (d. 626), and the Mononobe clan, led by Mononobe-no-Moriya 物部守屋 (d. 587). The fifteen-year-old Shōtoku, at the time already a devout Buddhist, gave his support to the Sogas, praying to the Four Heavenly Kings for the Sogas' victory. The Sogas did prevail in battle against the Mononobes, killing Moriya and largely destroying the latter clan's political influence.].

12 [editorial note 210 in the original] Emperor Wu 武帝 (464–549), founder of the Liang 梁 dynasty (502–556) of China, is generally remembered as a wise and benevolent ruler who emphasized education and stressed ethical behavior. He ruled according to Confucian principles but was also an ardent supporter of Buddhism, building numerous temples and ordaining many monks and nuns. Known as the Bodhisattva Emperor, he lived frugally, ate only vegetarian food, and even took the bodhisattva precepts. However, his lenience toward official corruption and his lessening involvement with state affairs during his later reign are believed to have contributed to the decline of the Liang.

13 [editorial note 211 in the original] Hou Jing 侯景 was a general of the Northern Wei, Eastern Wei, and Liang dynasties who rebelled against Emperor Wu in 548, capturing the capital Jiankang and laying siege to the palace. The emperor died a year later. Hou, reviled by history for his cruelty to both soldiers and civilians, died in 552.

cluded himself in the Himalayas where he suffered hunger and cold? Would one censure him for renouncing the glory of the throne, saying that his mind was [unduly] inclined towards Buddhist matters [*butsuji* 佛事]? On several occasions Emperor Wu of the Liang also attempted to leave his position and retire from the world, but each time the imperial court would not allow it. Finally the emperor tried to ensure his retirement by selling himself to the temple as a slave. Even then his ministers refused to permit it, returning the temple's money and restoring the emperor to the throne. It is hard to imagine that the emperor felt any great regret about his position having been usurped by Hou Jing. Viewing your present circumstances, it is evident that you cannot leave the world like the Tathāgata Śākyamuni or Emperor Wu of the Liang. If, like Prince Shōtoku, you advance the secular law for the sake of the Buddha's Law, then that would be most commendable. I have heard that the army of loyal soldiers you are presently raising is solely for the purpose of advancing the Buddhadharma. Thus I am confident that this nobly motivated undertaking will not meet defeat, even if everyone in the land were to join together in opposing you. I have offered you these straightforward words in the hope that, if they cause those who criticize you to turn from their deluded views [p. 59/60], then they will have been of some benefit.